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ABSTRACT

The teacher center, in this paper, is defined as an "institution established within an educational renewal site designed to facilitate change in instructional personnel primarily through inservice education and training experience." The authors advise that teacher centers must attend not only to the development and remediation of teaching skills but also to the personal style and value patterns of each teacher. A center is seen as requiring "close and continuing" cooperation among school systems, colleges, and universities, with additional assistance from professional associations and community agencies. Teacher preparation objectives, needs assessments that are central to the development of a center, and training needs are sketched. (LP/JA)

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THE FOCUS OF THE TEACHER CENTER IN AN EDUCATIONAL RENEWAL SITE

Draft IV

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Educational renewal requires the development and nurture of a regenerative capability in the schools. Meaningful educational renewal entails the ability of the schools simultaneously to carry out a defensible comprehensive instructional program while identifying and assessing the need for change within it and implementing appropriate changes with minimum disruption to the ongoing efforts in learning and instruction. Schools can neither afford to perpetuate endlessly what they now do nor to disrupt completely their present efforts at instruction while engaging in a process of change. The concept of educational renewal fits very well the reality confronting the schools for it supports the need for continuing or ongoing effort while providing within it elements of self-examination and improvement.

Educational renewal concerns change in schools. And change in schools is change in people--change in their individual behavior and change in the many inter-personal relationships that characterize the school as a social system. Educational reform at every level is dependent ultimately upon the effective competence of the teachers who man the instructional program. Good curricula, creative instructional materials, efficient organization and management, modern facilities and equipment---all of these contribute to the effectiveness of education. But all depend for their full realization upon the skill, the wisdom, and the commitment of teachers.

For this reason teacher centers are strategic and centrally important to the educational renewal sites selected and to the process of educational reform undertaken within them.

The teacher center is an institution established within an educational renewal site designed to facilitate change in instructional personnel primarily through inservice education and training experiences. Teacher centers seek to accomplish that purpose through their facilitation of cooperation among schools, colleges and universities, professional associations, and other community agencies concerned with education. A teacher center represents an important mechanism for delivering services needed by instructional personnel in order to improve their effectiveness in dealing with the teaching and learning problems of the classroom and school. A center is not viewed as assuming major responsibility for the generation of new ideas or promising innovations in curricula, instructional methods or materials but rather as an agency within each renewal site having the technical capability to train personnel to function effectively in relation to such innovations. Training experiences offered by teaching centers would likely include self-training and peer training as well as training by specialists from the center staff or from cooperating agencies secured on a contract basis. Clearly, the opportunity to review, develop and use instructional materials supportive of the teaching activities for which training was provided would also be appropriate as a function of the center.

As already noted, meaningful educational renewal cannot be accomplished without teacher renewal. Teacher renewal, however, is most effective when undertaken in a comprehensive change setting that also attends to curricular, material, organizational, and fiscal concerns. Thus teacher centers established as a part of a more comprehensive educational renewal site provide an opportunity of unique promise for educational reform.

A major activity of the teacher center should be training in the change process. The willingness to change among school staff is often obstructed by a lack of technical knowledge and skill in effecting change. Too often those interested in educational reform have attempted to bring about change by fiat or exhortation with little or no attention to training in the change process for those whose performance it is desired to alter.

Staff training is seen as the central function of the teacher center. But teaching is a complex, demanding task requiring equally complex and demanding training efforts at both pre-service and continuing education levels. Teacher competence can neither be defined nor developed in uni-dimensional terms. As James Young remarked, we must continue to view teacher competence "...through a prism of doing, being, and knowing."[1] No one of these facets is adequate to describe an effective teacher although, to be sure, the balance among them may vary considerably from individual to individual. Each teacher must be able to perform skillfully a number of instructional tasks, must represent a positive model for students of the sensitive, reflective, responsible individual, and must ground his professional behavior on a firm knowledge base. Teacher centers committed to the support of educational reform through increasing the effectiveness and competence of teachers must attend, therefore, not only to the development and remediation of teaching skills but to the personal style and value patterns of each teacher, and to

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[1] "Confusion is Certification by Performance," New York State Education 57, (February 1970), 20-23.

the substantive knowledge base which provides a context in which teachers may interpret events that occur in the classroom. Changed behavior among teachers is not produced simply through the acquisition of new knowledge but through the building of confidence in the utilization of a range of skills that are consistent with such knowledge.

A Broad Range of Objectives for Teacher Education

Since the continuing education of teachers should build upon and enrich their pre-service preparation it is worth reviewing the broad range of objectives for teacher education that may be applicable to either or both dimensions of the education of a teacher. Rather than choosing one or some cluster of these and ignoring others in the determination of function of a teacher center it is important to recognize the validity of each and seek to design integrated comprehensive training programs which may contribute to all objectives but in proportions which are varied to meet individual, instructional team, and community needs. Teacher preparation objectives of a comprehensive program should include:

1) Development and refinement of instructional skills---practical classroom "know-how"
2) Clarifying an image of what teaching is and what it could become ---generating aspirations for teaching
3) Improvement in communication skills
4) Development of attitudes supportive of an analytical, experimental approach to teaching, coupled with a commitment to continuing learning

5) Attainment of current knowledge in the content areas appropriate to each teacher, familiarity with basic concepts and principles central to them, and with applications of such knowledge at levels which are meaningful to the students they instruct

6) Fostering of appropriate personality and personal value patterns in such dimensions as adequate self-image, tolerance of ambiguity, capacity for empathy, etc.

7) Extension of management and coordination skills and the ability to cooperate with others, particularly in a context of differentiated teaching roles.

8) Achievement of professional "literacy" regarding significant educational issues and trends---i.e., financing public education, professional negotiations, etc.

9) Familiarity with current practice in the school and school system in which employed as well as with promising innovations being introduced elsewhere

10) Understanding of the change process as it relates to individuals and to social organizations

11) Awareness of cultural influences on behavior and an appreciation of the social context of the school and the cultural values of a broad range of ethnic, racial, and religious groups.

While each of these objectives might find a place in the program of a teacher center it is likely that the primary initial emphasis should be placed upon development

and remediation of specific instructional skills and an accompanying confidence in their use. Rather than resulting in a narrow, exclusively skill-oriented conception of teaching, the development of a broad repertoire of teaching skills may instead free teachers to engage in more diagnostic, analytical, and counseling activities with students and more cooperative planning with faculty colleagues. Teaching can become as a consequence more flexible, intelligent, and adaptable to differentiation in light of varying student needs. But if instructional skills are to become more than routinized applications of technical facility in standard circumstances they must be accompanied by contextual knowledge designed to help teachers understand why they do certain things and how teaching behavior can be adapted and differentiated in light of different student needs and changing social circumstances.

While teachers are the single most important group (excepting pupils) within the school structure, their performance is affected by and interrelated with the functioning of many other educational personnel. It seems, therefore, that singling out classroom teachers as the exclusive client group for teacher centers would preclude the full effectiveness of the center in fostering school improvement or reform. Teacher centers, therefore, should serve not only teachers but other school personnel as well, including paraprofessionals, volunteers, administrators and supervisors, specialists and ancillary personnel.

Needs Assessment and Teacher Centers

Needs assessment has been a concept central to the development of educational renewal sites. The idea has relevance also to the planning necessary

for a viable teacher center. Such needs assessments should take into account:

1) Needs of individual teachers
   a) As perceived by themselves
   b) As seen by supervisors, colleague teachers, and by students
2) Needs of functional groups of teachers (instructional teams, school staffs, etc.)
3) Needs of a total school system or appropriate regional subsystem with particular reference to input from parents and community representatives
4) Needs of the profession
   a) As identified by representatives of the organized profession
   b) As identified by the profession's chief training agents, the schools and colleges of education.

Types of Training Needs

It is expected that teacher centers may give attention appropriately to all of the following types of training needs of instructional personnel, although emphasis might vary widely from center to center and within the program of a given center as needs and priorities shifted.

1) Extension of the preservice training of beginning teachers during the first three years of teaching to raise their proficiency level to that necessary for a continuing staff member

2) Remedial programs for experienced teachers in areas where new developments may have rendered portions of their knowledge or technique obsolete

3) Preparation of personnel to implement particular innovations in staffing, curriculum, or media and materials

4) Massive training efforts associated with decisions to concentrate efforts on particular problems, curricular areas, target populations, etc. (i.e., reading, handicapped, drug abuse)

5) Training of aides and other paraprofessionals and of teachers in working effectively with them

6) Parent education and older student training programs designed with recognition of the supplementary roles which such groups might play in relation to the regular instructional staff.

7) Concomitant and problem specific training of administrative, supervisory, and ancillary personnel

8) Cooperation with colleges and universities in preservice preparation and in internship facets of graduate study.

Relationship to Existing Training Programs

Reflection on the types of training needs that might be met by teacher centers is likely to raise the question of possible duplication of present school or university programs for school staff development. The question is an important one for the limited resources currently available for education at every level make necessary their most efficient utilization. As Smith points out, however, "Programs of

perennial education in the universities and colleges are often chaotic... The work (a teacher) takes usually does not prepare him to be better at the tasks that arise on his job or, for that matter, to perform any tasks at all."[2]

This assessment generally applies with equal force to the inservice programs conducted by school systems, some of which follow the format of the usual university graduate course while others are fragmented and devoid of linkage between practice and its conceptual underpinnings.

If school staff members are to be prepared adequately to perform their roles, new training arrangements beyond those presently operative will be required. The teacher center, a new agency with access to the resources of existing institutions but without some of their build-in programmatic allegiances or institutional inertia, provides a promising means of meeting this urgent need.

School and College Cooperation

The concept of teacher centers described above demands a close and continuing cooperative relationship between the school system(s) involved and colleges and universities preparing teachers for service with them. The resources of higher education are particularly important to the development of theoretical context within which teachers' experience can be interpreted and to the development of broad value patterns among teachers which are supportive of educational reform. Also important is a close linkage between research and development

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[2] Smith, B. Othanel. Teachers for the Real World. Washington, D. C.: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1969.

activities heavily concentrated in colleges and universities and the field practices which they should be chiefly aimed at improving. To further perpetuate the already unfortunate separation of research from practice is likely to block educational reform other than that which conforms to the preconceived wisdom of some current establishment and to lose an opportunity to build into these promising new institutions a capacity for continuing renewal.

The development of continuing education opportunities for teachers must take into account the preservice experiences which colleges have already provided if we are to avoid needless duplication and serious omissions. Without such integration of effort by school systems and colleges a wasting of resources will result which our society can no longer tolerate. The concept of continuity of preservice and continuing education of teachers must be implemented in a manner that enables each to strengthen the other by assuming those training obligations which its resources uniquely qualify it to discharge.

Teacher centers can become significant factors influencing change in preservice education as well as improving continuing education but only if close collaboration and sustained interaction is maintained. All proposals for the establishment of teacher centers should, therefore, include specific plans for such relationships between the centers and institutions engaged in the preservice training of teachers and the systematic study of the educative process.

Alternatives for Training Delivery

The view of teacher centers as a mechanism for the delivery of training services raises the question of the means to be employed. One possible means

of providing service is for a teacher center to concentrate upon the dissemination of particular products in a manner similar to that of some of the regional education laboratories. Problems associated with such an approach include the need to develop a "market", that is, to persuade schools and school personnel that the product is potentially useful to them. This alternative appears to be an inefficient and doubtfully effective way to induce educational reform.

Another alternative is that of the teacher center attempting to develop independently programs and materials to meet the training needs of a school or of a group of school personnel and then to implement such programs. The costliness of such development projects and the time lag between needs identification and implementation represent major disadvantages of this approach, along with the likelihood of a high degree of duplication among centers as they address their efforts to similar concerns.

A third possible approach for a center is that of serving as a referral agency, directing school personnel to other agencies and institutions with capability to meet their needs. The unlikely availability of needed service or its remoteness if available make this alternative questionable.

Perhaps the most promising alternative is an eclectic one which sees the teacher center performing some development functions, particularly as they relate to processes; promoting and disseminating products and materials where they are essential to meet particular needs; locating a needed program and negotiating for the services of another agency or some of its staff on a

contract basis. This approach seems most viable because in it the teacher center operates as a delivery system which is service oriented rather than product bound. Assessed needs of the clients form the basis for center operations which are chiefly training activities linked to specific competency and performance criteria. The usefulness of such a center is enhanced because of its greater response capability and its broad access to training resources.

In Summary

The focus of teacher centers must be upon the continuing education and renewal of teachers throughout the full range of competencies implied by their capacity to do, to know, and to be, with at least initial emphasis upon instructional performance skills. Teacher improvement, linked closely as it is to organizational, curricular, materials development, and other facets of education reform, should be undertaken in a context providing for reinforcement of reform efforts from one field to the others. The blending of theoretical and applied dimensions of effective teaching and of the pre-service and continuing aspects of training programs makes essential a close cooperative relationship between schools and colleges. Training resources of professional organizations and community agencies concerned with education and human welfare should be utilized as well in the important task of continuing teacher renewal.

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